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Broadway looms for Jack Lemmon

By PAUL ROSENFIELD

BEVERLY HILLS — Not to panic and not to wilt, according to Jack Lemmon's first film director George Cukor, are the keys to survival. For an interviewer, there's another rule: Don't keep a movie star waiting.

On a rainy Saturday afternoon at The Saloon, Jack Lemmon was kept waiting. One of the longest running of Hollywood's long distance runners was unperturbed. He may be the only star of his stature who wouldn't panic, wilt, or walk out.

Is the affable actor apprehensive about his return to theater in Bernard Slade's new play 'Tribute' which opened in Toronto on Monday after an earlier tryout in Boston.

"Are you kidding? I'm apprehensive about saying hello!"

The play is testing for a Broadway run later this year. Lemmon hasn't been on Broadway since 'Face of a Hero' in 1961.

"One critic called it 'Trace of a Zero'," remembers Lemmon. "The morning after it opened, there were three movie scripts outside the door of my New York apartment. Thank God."

Now he's coming back.

Didn't take long

"Flash back one year. I open the door of my house and there's a brown paper bag with string around it. There's a script with a note: 'You may not remember me, but I wrote this for you. Bernard Slade.' It didn't take a lot of thought for me to say yes."

Slade's maiden Broadway effort 'Same Time, Next Year' opened in Boston three years ago with Ellen Burstyn and less than $400 in advances. "Theatergoers would come up to the box office and say 'Who's Ellen Bernstein?'," director Gene Saks recalled not long ago. 'Tribute' is on sounder footing, and the legs belong to Lemmon.

"We have to label everything, but you cannot label this play. It's deeper than 'Same Time' and funny and it is not a musical.

Lemmon plays a man facing up to his college-age son and, simultaneously, leukemia. A mean off-hours jazz pianist, Lemmon plays one of his own compositions in the show. And, unlike most star turns, 'Tribute' will not, he hopes, be a limited run.

"I geared up the family," Lemmon says over a rare hamburger. "I blocked the time out. It's a big hassle, and we may be back the day after the Broadway opening, but I'm revved up. I always think when a project is over I'll need three to four months to get back the adrenalin. But after a month, I'm ready."

This time, the actor had exactly four before starting 'Tribute' rehearsals. He'd just finished several months of 12-hour days on 'Power,' with Jane Fonda.

Won two Oscars

Lemmon is now 53, looking 35, thanking 25. The only actor to win Oscars in two categories (best supporting actor in 'Mr. Roberts' and best actor in 'Save the Tiger') he's a veteran of Hollywood wars, movie moguls, and career swerves. In order to do 'Power' with Fonda, Hollywood's hottest property at the moment, Lemmon didn't work for a year, since, ahem, 'Airport '77.'

"You do an 'Airport' in order to get the others — like 'Save The Tiger' — off the ground," he says. "Otherwise they say 'He's a nice fella, but not bankable.' You work to remain financially viable. It could be called playing it safe."

Lemmon has made 36 films in 24 years. He was a star in his first movie ('It Should Happen To You'). And he's one of the best-liked men in his industry.

A film buff may cringe at the memory of 'Under The Yum Yum Tree,' but Lemmon will explain: "Those were the movies that grossed the most."

First he popular, then be great, as Sarah Bernhardt used to say.

Fifteen years ago, Life magazine reported that Lemmon wondered if anyone liked him. With 'The Apartment' and 'Some Like It Hot' behind him, Lemmon was at a peak. And he was worried. Blame it on his youth.

"Or my bravura. I was very insecure. I've never told anyone this before, but the anxiety was so acute I'd walk around dizzy. Luckily, there was enough happening on the plus side to give me confidence."

One of the pluses was, of course, 'Days of Wine and Roses.' "The scariest case of DTs ever put on film..." as one critic called the performance. Lemmon, ever the Irishman, knew about the bottle.

That's Lemmon. The sweat no one sees.

"You do 98 takes and lose 15 pounds and it comes out light comedy. It's such a compliment when someone comes up to you and says 'You're so natural in the movies.' They don't know you didn't sleep for a week, and they shouldn't."

The former president of Harvard's Hasty Pudding Society, he had to borrow $300 from his father when he first hit New York in 1947.

'Right time'

"I was born at the right time. TV was in its infancy, and that was training time."

The class poet from Andover, who was also runnerup class clown, used his gifts and paid his dues. There were some 400 TV shows, and a Hollywood talent scout waiting in the wings.

When he hit the movies, George Cukor told him, "Do less-less-less." Lemmon hesitated, then asked the legendary director: "You mean NOT act?" The Reply: "Exactly."

And the actor, who has defined greatness "as the ability to do it more than once," never forgot.

Lemmon today looks leaner and looser than ever. Fearlessly, he got down to 151 pounds, and: "I'll be 141 by the time we open. That was my weight when I was 21. I can't go out and carouse anymore — when I'm working."

Not to panic and not to wilt. Jack Lemmon, one of the authentic good old boys of acting, knows just when to pick up his cues. Broadway, here he comes.

Is Jack Lemmon nervous? 'I'm apprehensive about saying hello,' he claims

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Andrea McCrady: This musician is no ding-a-ling

Medical student 'belle' makes the Oratory ring

By JOHN FITZGERALD
of The Gazette

"I have met the bell ringer of Notre Dame and her name isn't Quasimodo," deadpans Andrea McCrady, a 25-year old McGill medical student who for the past two years has been the official carillonneur (bell player) at St. Joseph's Oratory.

"Most people think we're all a little eccentric (real ding-a-lings if they know anything about us at all. That's a shame.

McCrady needn't worry about being a ding-a-ling. A native of Pittsburgh, she has a degree in history, knows several languages, spent a year travelling throughout Europe studying and playing the different carillons and hopes to become a general practitioner.

"I swore medicine would never get in the way of my bell-ringing," says McCrady, who became interested in bells when she heard the carillon at her old alma mater, Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

"A friend of mine used to play them and when I first heard her, I knew I was hooked.

So hooked in fact that she began to study them and received a travelling fellowship to Europe.

"Let's just say I saw Europe from the rooftops," says McCrady, settling in behind the clappers or keys of the instrument at the Oratory.

"I studied at the Dutch carillon school to gain some technique and must have played about 50 or 60 carillons on the continent.

"The standard carillon has 48 bells but the one here at St. Joseph's has about 56 and is pretty good."

She says there are less than a handful of carillonneurs in all of Canada but there is an international association and when she knew she was coming to Montreal she wrote to the man at the Oratory carillon.

He'd left to go to the Peace Tower in Ottawa but he gave me a letter of recommendation. The Oratory carillon was in pretty poor shape when I got here but I tinkered with it and the priests figured I knew what I was doing.

Since then, her repertoire has ranged from religious hymns and Christmas carols to Beatles' tunes, when she plays the bells Sundays from 4 to 5 p.m.

Beatles' tunes at the Oratory? Why not? The priests don't restrict the kinds of things I play but they do ask me to be tasteful. A short while ago, they had an Italian Mass here and they asked me to play Arrivederci Roma.

Uses pedals

The Oratory bells were constructed in 1955, says McCrady, the console costing about $5,000 and the whole carillon apparatus worth about $150,000. The carillon is situated on the left side of the Oratory just behind the restaurant and souvenir building.

"The unique thing about the carillon here is that you can actually see the person playing the bells." She uses pedals and her wrists to touch down on the wooden clappers.

I've played piano since I was five and I never had any trouble picking this up. It's really a Dutch instrument, developed in the Lowlands in the 16th century.

"The bells have different harmonic series and I try to choose music that sounds better on bells. But I have to keep adjusting the wires because they tend to contract when the weather changes.

"I've spent some pretty cold winter days up there among the bells fiddling around with a coat hanger."

McCrady says that in Europe, especially in Holland and Belgium, the carillon is a real concert instrument but here it is something of an oddity.

"People think everything is electric but that isn't so. The real art of carillon playing is improvization. You have to learn how to mix this and that and come up with something different."

So far, McCrady has managed to combine her studies with her bells.

"I'd like to go into general medicine but not in the United States. I wanted a profession which would change from day to day and give me mobility. Some people may disagree with me but I think medicine isn't a parasitic profession."

In the States they practise so much defensive medicine with the fear of law suits and they overwork the patient with tests just to say they've done them, that they're thorough. When I finally choose someplace to work, it would be nice to be near a carillon.

In August, McCrady will be heading back to Europe to participate in a series of carillon competitions and she has started to give lessons to one of the brothers at the Oratory so there will be someone to play them when she leaves.

"I've always been able to relax through music, mostly the classical kind and there's something really splendid about bells.

"I'd be interested in reactivating a couple of towers here in Montreal. There are 10 bells at St. Patrick's Church and they haven't been rung in 20 years.

"The ones at Notre Dame Cathedral here are done electrically so there aren't that many.

Neither she nor the Oratory fathers believe she has to stick to strictly religious works.

"I've done Quebecois folk songs, pop tunes and ragtime. Everybody starts swaying and having a good time when I do something like 'Let Me Call You Sweetheart.'

"Only one of my friends thought it a little strange for some of the pilgrims who make it up the Oratory stairs on their knees only to hear the 'Grizzly Bear Rag' when they get to the top."

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